OBSERVATIONS

BY SARAH B. HARRIS

Poets

RHYMING comes easy to some. Babies occasionally lisp rhymed couplets and among the millions of combinations to which the English language is susceptible there is necessarily a large proportion which may be written or spoken in measured and rhymed syllables. Occasionally a person who is not immune from the contagion of poetry-making stumbles into rhyming or a pair of metrical sentences. The feat, accidental though it be, goes to his head like the first drink of champagne, and the future course of that man cannot be insured. It is quite likely that he will begin his descent into avernus by writing a poem for the local paper wherein he will violently force spoon to rhyme with doom, or hurry with bury. If an intimidated or friendly editor prints the awful thing, it is the beginning of the end. The man may be a good lawyer or dentist: es macht nichts aus; thereafter he carries a deadly roll of poems in his pockets and reads them to the acquaintances he meets on the cars or in any moment between acts when the acquaintance has calculated on a sorporific smoke, day-dream or reading-leisure. The rhymer may be a thoroughly good fellow, but his fellowmen avoid him as they do infection. He pines to hear his own voice reading his own poetry, and the longing destroys all pity for his fellows and all sense of humor. The essence of camaraderie is volatile and it is dissipated by the love of applause which induces the banal rhymer to read his own poems to friends he hopes to reduce.

Contrariwise there are rhymers with an unerring sense of rhythm whose lines flow easily and naturally. Their ways are the ways of pleasantness and they say what they wish to without being forced into nonsense in search of a rhyme. They are not enslaved by the medium of communication, they are born masters of it. No man can compose a poem a day. The number of talented men and women who write a half column or so a day of melodious, pointed rhymes and occasionally a poem of real depth and sweetness are not appreciated to their talent's fullness partly on account of these first rhymers who embarrass every editor and see no difference between their work and the work of a true poet's metrical, pointed stanzas. Between the poet of passion and of sentiment there is a chasm seldom crossed, but the everyday poet is read by thousands. Literary fellows discover the poet of passion and he is the idol for a day of a cult. The Longfellows whom the critics call commonplace, who wrote poems about the village blacksmith shop, about a bridge, about a clock, about his children and about other homely commonplace things, are read by the multitude, and rejoice the heart of the many.

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Suicide

A mother sixty-three years old and a son twenty-four years of age took poison last week in Minneapolis. Their reasons for killing themselves were stated in a letter to the public written by the son. He said that he and his mother had six reasons for leaving this world. The six were restatements of the same complaint: inability to support themselves. They were Swedes, and the son had gone to college just long enough to acquire a contempt for manual labor and a conceit of writing. He persuaded his mother that he was fitted for something better than laboring with his hands, but he could find no market for his brains and for his crude composition, so he persuaded his mother that the best thing for both of them was to voluntarily leave an unappreciative world. He was the last of seven not very sound offspring, and so she was convinced that her poor, brilliant son was right and she took poison to please him. The last letter expressing the reasons for the double suicide is a pathetic commentary on the danger of a little learning and the fatal fascination of stringing long words together.

In the winter there is plenty of work, hard work, in Minnesota. A man who can not find it, is looking for a superintendency or some kind of an exalted job in keeping with his ideas of his talents. The son said he could not find any sympathy in America. He was foolish, vain and shiftless. Everybody is conscious of powers unrecognized and untried. The world is one's schooldays over again. A boy is never called upon to recite that part of the lesson which he knows brilliantly. Someone else was always called upon to recite the portion of the lesson which I knew best and could have electrified the class and unsuspecting teacher by reciting. The rest of the class do not realize that the blunders of the particular pupil who is reciting are teaching and hinting the correct answer to them.

The man who kills himself is a coward. If he has not received sympathy, he has given none. If he is underestimated, he has not done his best. The boy said he was unfit to live in a heartless world. He was lacking in courage and in understanding and he killed himself because he could not read the riddle of life.

Wars and pestilence have ceased to weed out the unfit. The suicidal impulse is accomplishing a very small part of the weeding that used to be done by constant warfare and sweeping epidemics. There are people, lots of people, who are too silly to live, but they get married and increase the number of imbeciles. This boy had sense enough to know that his aspirations coupled with his objections to hard work, would make him unhappy all his life and he preferred to die. But he might have let his poor old doting mother live. Suicide is the last resort of nature for getting rid of the unfit. Not so many will kill themselves when it is generally accepted that the young and healthy who kill themselves are cowards and conceited donkeys who do it to get at least a momentary prominence and excite a sympathy they do not deserve.

When a man realizes that he has an incurable disease that will kill him slowly and most painfully there is an excuse for suicide. The well and strong can not condemn him because pain transforms. Or when disgrace, merited or not, stares a man in the face it is unrighteous for the immune to condemn him. But for lack of sympathy, with a name untarnished, and muscled like an ox, to kill himself at twenty-four is a certain indication of unfitness for this world; and the newspaper sympathy which has been offered the young man is superfluous. What is left should be coined into help for those who have the courage and the sense to live and work.

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"Wise Old Females"

Although man has lived a neighbor to animals something like ten thousand years, or ever since the world was made and stocked with men and beasts, it is only of late years that we have learned anything authentic about what we have the nerve to call the "lower animals." They know very many more facts about us than we have collected in all this time about them.

Just as soon as man had established his championship over all the beasts of the field, the birds of the air and the leviathans and little fishes of the deep, classes in ethnology and anthropology especially for the young were organized by the wise old females of all extra-human species. If what animals know about man's habits could be put in one big book and what man knows about the habits of animals could be put in another book, and everything excluded from both that is not authentic, how small the man-book would be and how big the book compiled from what the animals know of the habits of man.

Animals inherit what their ancestors have discovered; and everything they learn, besides adding to their own special treasure of knowledge, is finally transmitted to their offspring. The young of animals are born wise, with the wisdom of a thousand years gathered by forest-bright eyes hidden behind a covert, too cunningly devised for an animal on two legs to discover, an animal with his nose five feet up from the ground and not a very highly developed nose for smelling either.

Man's habit of killing every animal whose meat he has a taste for or which fights hard enough for its life to put him on his mettle as a sportsman, made it necessary for the animals to learn his habits and tastes. They have learned it without prejudice or traditional or bookish preconceptions. They know so much that any old crow could tell a given man more about his outdoor habits than Cheiro, the palmist, can. Only the crow is dumb, and does not care to maintain the pose of a necromancer.

Rudyard Kipling was the first romancer to feel the reproach of an animal's superior education. But he studies animals from a distance and with offish manners and the haughtiness of an Englishman and a novelist. Distinguished zoologists, and especially ornithologists, have studied the animal world and learned to divide them into species and make endless subdivisions. Nearly everything from microscopic bugs to the new horse-thing that has been discovered recently in central Africa has been ascribed to its remote subdivisions. Its functions, number of toes, choice of a menu, manner of suckling its young, et cetera, determine its name and class.

But all these things are outward and obvious. Rudyard Kipling, Ernest Thompson Seton, and a man or two besides have begun to study animals from a psychological standpoint. A writer studies groups of men and the eccentricities of individuals, knowing that a certain model is different from every other man that ever lived and that success as a writer depends upon his seizing and photograping the characteristics which isolate him from all other men while retaining the essence of the type and of humanity. But the novelist is constantly tempted from truth by the desire for picturesqueness and sensation. The animal knows no such temptations. He knows that upon the absolute accuracy of his observations depends his life, which to animals—though not to man or there would be no Czolgoszes—is of the first importance. Therefore what the animals know about man is authentic, verified by thousands of years of patient watching and now partly turned into instinct, or the body of knowledge inherited by an animal from his entire ancestry.

By close observation man may discover the animals' flawless characterization of man. Until lately we have been unconscious that there was any science of man among beasts. Animal psychology has not been exhausted. A few chapters of the first primer have been published by Mr. Seton to the edification of heretofore contemptuous mankind. Romanes, Burroughs, Miss Miller and an unremembered number have published some authentic sketches of domestic animals and birds, but the fields, have not been worked at all in comparison with their extent and the variety and value of the deposits. Mr. Seton is the most popular explorer, and his reports and the picturesqueness of his temperament have set hundreds to working in the same department. A find in literature is like a new discovery of gold. Thousands are dazzled by the results of one man's originality, enterprise and luck. They rush into the district wherein the discoverer reports gold.